

HOPE A. CRISTOBAL – GUAM AUGUST 6, 2022

Håfa adai! Warmest greetings honorable guests, members of the World Conference Against A & H Bombs, the extraordinarily courageous Hibakusha, sisters and brothers and co-visionaries for a world without war, Ladies, and Gentlemen, thank you for this honor to stand in solidarity with you for a nuclear weapons-free world and for justice, peace, and genuine security. I join you in the call to end the proliferation of nuclear weapons, nuclear devastation, and militarization and to ensure a peaceful, sustainable future.

Our lives in Guam and the greater Marianas Islands are complicated by the very powerful U.S. military using every means at their disposal to deny, deprive, and dispossess us of our lands, our identity, our sovereignty, and our human rights. Along with individual activists and supporters we are steadfast in actively protecting and defending our people and island home through organizations such as the Guåhan Coalition for Peace and Justice, Fuetsan Famalao'an (Strength of Women), the Organization of People for Indigenous Rights (OPI-R), I Hagan Famalao'an Guåhan (Daughters of Guam), Independent Guåhan, and Prutehi Litekyan: Save Ritidian. These groups advance our efforts within international frameworks of decolonization and demilitarization.

Death and destruction continue to pervade the world today. We are living in a time where we are overwhelmed with war propaganda, amidst our collective trauma and grief during a relentless global pandemic. In Guam, the memories of the cruelties of wars in our homeland remain present in our minds, as we and the rest of the world watch the violence that has been perpetrated against the people of Ukraine, along with the persistent atrocities and intentional obfuscation of the wars in Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine. War is averse to our nature as human beings, and we cannot allow ourselves to become desensitized.

Our islands are made to witness the ways rising tensions for global domination and the burdens of war unfold in the pivot to the Pacific. Our hearts remain fraught with the unremitting anguish of the historic and enduring nuclearization of the Pacific Islands and the legacy of violent environmental racism, erasure, and displacement from nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands. We know the clear connections between colonization, militarization, capitalism, genocide, white supremacy, and racial violence in the U.S.

As islanders, we understand the real limitations of our lands and waters and the unforgiving circumstances of climate crisis. Increased militarization, war, environmental destruction, and contamination only exacerbate these threats. Sadly, Guam is often the example of the hard lessons of colonization for the rest of Micronesia and the Pacific to observe and learn from. Bearing these struggles, it can feel as if war has never actually left our homelands.

Our people have suffered numerous harms since the United States took colonial control over Guam in 1898, including racist and discriminatory treatment by naval authorities; negative health outcomes resulting from the storage and usage of nuclear weapons, radioactive vessels and toxic chemical agents including PFAS (Per and Polyfluorinated Substances) and Agent Orange. Even now, the US Air Force plans to blow up bombs and burn toxic waste along our Northern coastline and on ancestral lands. Our people have become afflicted with rare illnesses and conditions associated with this exposure and cancer continues to be the 2nd highest leading cause of death. And now, we've learned that the Regulatory Commission on Nuclear Power Plants in Japan have approved a plan to dump into our seas the "treated contaminated water" from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant clean-up—water that will have tremendous health impacts on our Pacific peoples!

We may often feel restless and desperate, as empire continues to test the bounds of our dignity, our identities, and mother Earth. Yet, we are bound as people--not in trauma alone, but in our resilience and our eager anticipation for peace in our Pacific Ocean home and throughout the world.

We know that if colonization and militarization were to evaporate, we would see the ends to poverty, hunger, environmental destruction, the exploitation of people and planet, and a halt to climate change. With the end of such violent oppression, we could realize our most magnificent dreams and finally be able to truly cultivate our indigenous brilliance. In the face of such crises, we remain committed and hone our passion, our love, our creativity, and our wisdom. And we continue to fight.

War between the U.S. and Japan resulted in our current colonial reality including ongoing massive military expansion in Guam and all the injustice it brings. The U.S. seized large tracts of lands and continues to occupy nearly 30% of our island, controlling a great deal of resources. The families whose lands were condemned and stolen, have never truly mended that rupture.

Our genealogies are tied with the land. For decades, we have confronted the many human and indigenous rights violations against the CHamoru people, the devastating cultural erosion, the ancestral desecrations and the poisoning of our lands and waters. We have worked tirelessly to expose innumerable injustices and inform our people of soil and water contaminations from toxic hazardous wastes, Superfund sites, formerly used defense sites and installation restoration projects containing substances so dangerous our lands may never recover. We've responded to numerous calls of Environmental Impact Statements under U.S. federal NEPA requirements but feel these are but exercises in futility that exclude our people's greater call for self-determination and decolonization.

Our quest for self-determination and decolonization has been obstructed for well over a century and our colonizer continues to confound the issue of universal rights of individuals with the special rights of our indigenous peoples who have been ignored, divided, and pushed to the brink of extinction.

Guam's colonial status as an unincorporated territory of the U.S. yet, a non-selfgoverning territory under the United Nations C-24 and 4th Committee is tightly intertwined with the US Military presence, and WE must battle both concurrently. The military expansion has brought the clearing of over 1,200 acres of limestone forest for a new base and live-fire training ranges with roughly 7 million ammunitions fired annually over our sole source aquifer, compounded with some 22 water wells planned inside the military fences, each to withdraw over a million gallons of fresh water every day from the northern Guam lens aquifer. Endangered and threatened species including medicinal plants are being destroyed. Countless ancestral remains have been defiled as we continue to challenge the persistent disregard for our right to free, prior, and informed consent regarding the military expansion in Guam.

We continue the arduous fight against the desecration and defilement of our ancestors, our ancestral villages that contain sacred evidence of their free lives (and ours by extension), as well as important fishing grounds, places of cultivation of traditional medicines, and other sacred sites of great significance to our people. It is for our ancestors and our elders that we continue to hold ceremonies at sites of destruction to connect our community with those who have been dishonored and disturbed in their *långits* or final resting places. These include burials at Gokña, Mata'pang, Naton, Litekyan, Finegayan, Machanao, Sabanan Fadang, and Maguak, the site of the new Marine Base in Guam and many others. It is in this time of turmoil that we must illuminate our history and traditions in honoring our deceased with offerings, songs, stories, and chants to restore and strengthen our community reverence, respect, and love for our ancestors, all that is sacred and invoke our Creator to give them Peace. They were a free people, and they are our link to our sovereignty.

Guam and the rest of Micronesia are obviously chosen sites of oppression and empire because we are far away enough from the mainstream American view and benign ignorance that buys into the myth that war paves the path to freedom. We remain steadfast to protect and defend what is sacred every day.

We always hope to appeal to the humanity of our colonizers, to make them see something of us in themselves, to know the realities of a colonized people so that they can perhaps join us in our effort to maintain our rights as indigenous people. They must come to understand the hurt and the longing to return to our land, and the grief and the deep loss we all carry--our heritage,

freedom, and peace. We must work to deconstruct and eradicate the economics of apathy, the logic of fear, and the demand for domination, Guam and control that keep us from liberation. We must advance with dignity, purpose, and vision.

There is still so much to be done. We must revitalize our relationships. We must be steadfast and watch over each other to help safeguard our heritage from the threats of empire. We cannot give up Tini'an and Pagan islands in the Marianas. We must caution Palau about destructive military occupation and exercises.

Our humanity is constantly being challenged by ways of warring. Historical accounts recognize CHamoru indigenous values of compassion, and mercy. In times of battle, warring groups would pause to take care of the wounded and if they felt there was no need to continue, they would retreat. We must continue to embody such empathy, kindness, and care in these increasing volatile times.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak truth from the depths of my heart. May we continue to unite in efforts not only to improve the lives of our peoples but also to attain the Peace that we all long for in this world. (Thank you!)

Si Yu'os Ma'åse

Nobel Peace Nominee 2022